Letters to the Tribune's Editor

I wholly disapprove of what you say and will defend to the death your right to say it.—Voltaire to Helvetius.

Self-Supporting Prisons

State Institutions the Logical Market for Jail Products—No Inroads on Free Labor

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: The time is ripe for an effort toward improvement in the prisoner's condition which is solidly based and free from emotion. This must lie in making it more generally advantageous to treat the prisoner well. The doctrine is not novel. In fact it is a hundred years since Elizabeth Fry first set forth the truth that the lot of the prisoner could be made tolerable only by giving him productive work to do, and practically every step of progress in improving the lot of prisoners and lifting the level of prison administration has been brought about by applying Elizabeth Fry's doctrine.

Productive employment in prisons is the only sound basis for their steady progress toward sound conditions. Furthermore, the productive employment must be organized in such manner that gradually the prisons will become self-supporting. As a business man I can see no necessity for the heavy taxation imposed on law-abiding citizens in order to maintain able-bodied, mentally sound lawbreakers.

The goal at which all efforts for amelioration should aim is that every prison shall be a workshop for restoring prisoners at the end of their term to civil life in condition to be useful members of the community. Unless the prison fulfills a remedial function; unless it brings about an actual improvement—physically, mentally and morally—in those who are subjected to its treatment it is, in a very large sense, a failure.

Happily, progress has been made during the last ten years toward giving the prisoners productive labor and enabling them to recover at least a part of their economic self-respect.

There is still an immense work to be done in this direction, and a little observation will show how serious are the obstacles. The prisoner cannot be occupied properly at productive labor unless there is a market for what he produces. Here there have arisen a great number of obstacles. Where can such a market be found in which prison products will not compete unfairly with the products of free labor? The logical market for prison products is in the commodity requirements of state institutions and departments—for only when the state sells its products to state institutions and departments is its selling department adequately protected from the manipulations of the politician.

Unfair competition with the products of free labor is also eliminated by governmental consumption of prison products. In working to better the condition of the prisoner we should not forget the welfare of the workman outside the prison, to say nothing of the welfare of the employer.

How can prison labor be directed so as to produce what the institutions can consume when, as too often has been the case, those institutions are numerous, heterogeneous and under diverse management? If you have, as was the case in the State of New York until recently, fifty-eight purchasing agents, each one exhibiting originality, or at least variation, in his requirements and standards, it is clear that the prison will hardly stand any chance of producing goods suitable for such an immense and unpredictable variety of commodities. This has wrecked many an attempt to employ prison labor on a productive basis, and herein has lain one of the great obstacles to prison reform.

Some years ago efforts were begun to bring about uniform standards and centralized purchase within the states, so as to obviate the unreasonable variety of demands and multiplicity of purchasing agents. This movement, so obviously reasonable and economical, has made much progress. It has been embodied to a greater or less extent in the legislation of all but eight of the states, while twenty-three have the full provision, and there are grounds for hope that it will be pressed to acceptance and adoption in all the states of the Union. It is simply the application of the purchase methods adopted by all successful business corporations to the purchase methods of governments.

A mere glance will show the advantages to be obtained from uniform standards and central purchase. They make it possible for the entire requirements of state institutions in such a simple matter as shirts and shoes to be made uniform, and so enable the production of these necessary articles by prison labor in such quantity and on such simple standards as to make their production economical.

An adequate market for prison products makes possible the payment of adequate wages to prisoners. If there is an established market and demand for the product of the prisoner's labor, and if he can produce the articles required at a reasonable price, he has already taken his place among the profitable workers. It follows that he may—and in justice should—receive payment for his work. He is lifted from the level of a mere burden on society, and in some cases a menace to its welfare, into the class of the producer. If this can be recognized in the only proper manner—by payment for his work and by giving him the conditions of labor, in which self-respect will be possible—plainly a very great step has been taken in the direction of making him once more a safe, useful and self-respecting member of society.

That is the goal which enlightened and humane persons have kept before themselves from generation to generation. It is, of course, intolerable that men should be incarcerated under such conditions as are almost certain to degrade, if not to brutalize, them, and which tend to make them thus a greater menace to the society which they have already injured. The very self-respect of the community, as well as the instinct for self-preservation, demands that it prevent the degradation of the prisoner and do all that is possible to bring him into sound and decent relationship with society. But the goal is still a long way off.

Let us work together for an American prison system which will answer the age-long challenge—what shall be done with the men in prison?

ADOLPH LEWISOHN.

New York, Nov. 8, 1922.

Masters of English

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: I have read "Reader's" letter in which he gives his list of the half dozen greatest contemporary writers of English—Hudson, Hardy, Conrad, Kipling, Morley and Shaw. Surely one need be neither too conservative nor overcatholic to give a more felicitous list.

Professor Phelps in his admirable little book, "The Advance of the English Novel," asks what contemporary English novelists write with soberness of mind. And he answers that no modern novelists have higher ideals than Joseph Conrad, J. M. Barrie, John Galsworthy, May Sinclair and Mary Patricia Willcocks.

It seems to me that any list of greatest contemporary writers would be incomplete without the name of John Galsworthy. He combines a prose style which is second to none with great sincerity and high purpose. Therefore my list begins with the name of Galsworthy. I am afraid the name of Kipling would be replaced by that of the greater artist, John Masefield. Poet, dramatist and novelist, he deserves a place with the immortals for "Pompey the Great."

My list does not contain the cherished name of Hardy—for, great as he is, he belongs to a bygone age. Conrad, of course, should have a place, nor would I slight H. G. Wells. You may like "Tono-Bungay"; I may prefer "Wife of Sir Isaac Harmon." But is there anybody who does not count at least one of the works of H. G. Wells as a special favorite?

Shaw makes way for Barrie—dear J. M., who sees life so keenly but so kindly. If we limit the list to half a dozen, Hudson must fight to retain his place. For there's W. Somerset Maugham. His "Of Human Bondage" ranks with Butler's "Way of All Flesh." That alone entitles him to a place on our list. And may it not be that some day "Our Betters" and "The Circle" will be considered with the plays of Sheridan and Wilde as the great comedies of English manners?

HENRY LEFFERT.

New York, Nov. 9, 1922.

A Smith Voter's Reasons

"One of the Gallery" Supported Him on Eight Counts

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: As one of the gallery to whom you refer in your editorial on "Governor Miller in Defeat," I would like to take exception to the implication that the gallery is an unthinking electorate.

I voted for Alfred E. Smith for the following reasons:

1. Because I am in favor of the direct primary.

2. I am opposed to Federal paternalism as embodied in the Eighteenth Amendment, which encroaches on state's rights.

3. I am opposed to the state administration sending a group down to run the affairs of New York City. Exit the Transit Commission.

4 I am opposed to the Mullan-Gage act, because it produces crime.

5. I am opposed to the Lusk law, because it was enacted at the instance of professional patriots.

6. I am opposed to czarism as shown by Governor Miller's repulse of John J. Lyons, Jeremiah Wood and Charles D. Newton.

7. I favor public ownership of public utilities.

8. I am in favor of government by all of the people of the state as opposed to group government.

Governor Miller has been and is an intellectual giant. But he does not surpass Smith in intelligence or statesmanship. Is he a greater public man than Smith? Is he a greater administrator than Smith? Alfred E. Smith steered the ship of state through one of its most trying periods in history. I refer to the reconstruction period of 1918-'20.

There are many of the gallery who do not forget that Governor Miller, in 1919, preferred to discuss Article X instead of state issues. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. However, I agree with you as to Smith's fight against the menacing candidacy of W. R. Hearst.

In the foregoing I have tried to show that the people think, as Governor Miller said they would. We would at least appreciate a little credit for that from your paper.

JAMES P. MARTIN.

New York, Nov. 8, 1922.

Might Take Up Bootlegging

(From The Chicago Daily News)

When spirit messages from the other world are carried by radio some hard-working "controls" of the old regime will be walking the streets of the great beyond, their occupation gone.

The Half With the Stinger

(From The Toronto Globe)

A North Dakota man has sold a half-interest in a bee to an Alabama apiarist for $150. The dispatch does not say which half.

The G. A. R. Encampment

A Veteran's Account of the Reunion at Des Moines—The Question of Increasing Pensions

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: I should like to call the attention of your readers to some of the proceedings of the Grand Army of the Republic at its recent encampment held at Des Moines, Iowa.

There came about 17,000 veterans, from Maine to California. Many of them came alone, took care of themselves on the long journey, looked out for changes of cars and routes, secured their own hotel accommodations, carried their own grips and went about the appointed business like men who expect to live for fifty years.

They elected as commander in chief Judge James W. Willett, of Tama, Iowa, a splendid specimen of the solider type, with a fine presence and a clear, ringing voice.

They suggested to the women of the country that they form no more societies with "G. A. R." attached to the name chosen, intimating that they had no desire to turn the encampment into some political and social flub-dub. They told everybody that the Grand Army had but one auxiliary, the Woman's Relief Corps, which has stood by the veterans since its organization.

They denounced the attempt to change the designation of the Civil War from "the War of the Rebellion" to "the War Between the States."

In relation to the coal and railroad strikes, they declared the issues involved in both to be purely selfish and based on greed.

They declared the right of every man to work, whether he belonged to a union or not, and that the same man had the right to quit work, subject to his liability for violation of contract. They denied the right of every man who has abandoned work to prevent another from doing that work and doing it in peace.

They urged that the pledge to the flag be changed upon "my flag" to "the American flag."

Milwaukee was chosen as the next place of meeting, in 1923.

The people of the Iowa city cut loose to honor the veterans. The streetcar companies and many places seemed to think that the old men came loaded down with counterfeit money, and refused to aid in the crime of putting it in circulation. Many autos were labeled "Hop in. We're going there."

The children are ever the true allies of the Grand Army. They were out in thousands and yelled as only happy, healthy kids can. A pretty child and a grizzled veteran may seem a long way apart, but it may be the two ends of the great circle coming close together.

Let us remember that it has been sixty-one years since Sumter was fired on, fifty-nine years since the great battle of Gettsyburg, fifty-seven years since Appomattox and the historic surrender.

For fifty-four years the living comrades have held their simple services and laid flowers on the graves of their dead comrades as each May time came. Records say that there were 4,306,567 men who served as soldiers in the Union Army. The same records state that of these men, about 800,000 were under eighteen years of age. More than 200,000 were sixteen or less, and some 100,000 were about fifteen years of age. (It seems incredible, but I enlisted at the age of sixteen, and I knew there were many boys of about my age and it all seemed natural enough. Indeed, officers generally preferred boys in their commands to older men, as they had more dash, obeyed orders more promptly and recovered from fatigue more quickly.)

At the close of the war over 200,000 men marched in the grand review up Pennsylvania Avenue, and this was estimated as about one-fourth of the entire army at that time. For many years the grand parade at the annual encampment of the G. A. R. would have 75,000, then 50,000, and so on down, as death claimed its annual harvest.

For over fifty years the men of the Grand Army directed the affairs of this nation. Five of their number were elected as the heads of the nation they aided to save. For two generations they struggled to save the country from internal foes, from the horrors of reconstruction and the craze of inflated currency. Many of the ex-soldiers went West to fight the hostile savages and subdue that great region.

For two generations they had representatives in both branches of Congress, members in the Cabinet, many governors of states, and in hundreds of positions of honor and trust.

Senator Bursum recently introduced a bill to raise the amount of pension paid veterans and their widows, and in a speech to his fellow Senators he stated the facts as to why his bill should pass. He stated that the number of veterans on the pension rolls was rapidly diminishing by death. "They died at the rate of 5,000 per month last year, or a total loss of about 60,000. There will be a loss of 75,000 this year, I feel certain. Their average age is seventy-eight years; their expectancy of life is only about five and one-half years. The increase in pension would cause an increase in the expense budget for a short time, but this would soon be balanced by the death losses."

There are the hard, cold facts.

C. J. GREENLEAF,
Private 24th Michigan, Iron Brigade.

New York, Nov. 9, 1922.

Faith Healing

To the Editor of The Tribune.

Sir: I see that the medical men would insist upon making faith healing a mere commercial enterprise.

To any one who attended the meetings conducted by James Moore Hickson in Trinity Chapel, two or three years ago, this will indeed seem a calamity. There, free from the clamor and turmoil of the world outside, which is imposing so many onerous conditions as to the way people shall live—in the dim quiet of the little church; no pomp, no canonical form; no grave, serious, awe-inspiring physician—there the plain, unassuming, earnest man affiliated with no money-making profession laid his hands with prayer upon those who came to him with faith in their hearts, and they received both physical and psychical benefit. And their faces as they came down from the chancel were such as I never have seen coming from a church service nor from a physician's office.

We have our hospitals for the sick; churches for everybody. Let us keep simple faith healing free from commercialism.

R. E. M.

New York, Nov. 9, 1922.

Perhaps He's Hit Home Brew

(From The Indianapolis News)

Considering his other characteristics, its seems to be quite fortunate that the Turk is a prohibitionist.